



DPAA Family/VSO Quarterly Call and Update
April 29, 2025, 3:00-4:00 PM EDT
Fulfilling Our Nation's Promise



Summary: Keeping the families of our missing personnel and veterans informed is a key component of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency's (DPAA) mission. This update summarizes our efforts from the last quarter to account for our missing personnel.

Family Group/Veterans Service Organization Participants:

- Vietnam Veterans of America: Grant Coates
- Special Operations Association/Special Forces Association: David Gordon
- Sons and Daughters in Touch: Colleen Shine
- Disabled American Veterans: Justin Hart
- Veterans of Foreign Wars: Brad Hazell
- Mission: POW-MIA: Dave Huffman
- Coalition of Families of Korea/Cold War POW/MIAs: Donna Knox
- Jewish War Veterans: Ken Greenberg
- National League of POW/MIA Families: Aaron Ahlstrom

Director's Update (Mr. Kelly McKeague)

FY 2025 Budget. In March, Congress passed and the President signed legislation for a full-year Continuing Resolution that extends appropriations through September 30. There are no impacts to our funding because it is apportioned at our higher Fiscal Year 2024 budget amount, so we can fully fund our increased operations plan and other requirements.

EO-Related Actions. As Federal Agencies continue to implement the President's Executive Orders, several EOs are related to organizational and workforce optimization. Wherever we are allowed to seek an exemption, to include from any reductions (both personnel and budget), we are doing so, using mission critical justifications that tout DPAA's statutory mandate, congruency with the Secretary's priorities, and serving the greater public interest.

Secretary of Defense. Secretary Hegseth spent over 90 minutes at DPAA during his trip to Hawaii in late March. He presented coins to 6 military and civilian personnel, received an in-depth tour of the laboratory, and taped an announcement of the 100th identification from the 55 boxes that North Korea turned over in 2018. DPAA's embodiment of the Warrior Ethos resonated strongly with the Secretary. During his visit to the Manila American Cemetery, he placed a bronze rosette next to the name of an Army 2nd Lieutenant who was a Cabanatuan POW Camp Unknown who was identified on March 3.

Ambassador Engagement. The U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam met virtually with 26 individuals representing 8 Family Groups and VSOs. He spoke about the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the two countries in the context of the 50th Anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War, the 30th Anniversary of the normalization of US-Vietnam relations, and in between, the 40th Anniversary of the first joint US-Vietnam remains recovery mission.

Japan Trip: My visit to Japan included meetings with the Japanese Minister of Health, Labor, and Welfare, with whom we have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU); several Diet Members including two former Prime Ministers; the US Forces Japan Deputy Commander; and the US Embassy team. Japan's effort to recover its missing soldiers from World War II (WWII) is wide-ranging and the frequent collocation of American and Japanese remains drives critical scientific collaboration.

AFROTC Commitment. I provided remarks to cadets attending the AFROTC National Conclave in Atlanta. The POW/MIA mission is AFROTC's designated national project, and annually, AFROTC detachments throughout the country prominently commemorate it with 24-Hour Vigils and City-to-City runs. The cadets' awareness and enthusiasm of, and commitment to, the Warrior Ethos of never leaving an Airman behind is impressive.

KW Engagements. The Principal Deputy Director (PDD) spoke to the Korean War Veterans Association Board of Directors. We appreciate these opportunities to provide updates on our mission and to connect with members of your groups. She and four others from DPAA also attended two events sponsored by the Republic of Korea (ROK) Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs in Washington. The support of MPVA to Korean War Families and Veterans is unmatched. They tangibly appreciate and honor the sacrifice of American Service members so they can live in a free and prosperous country.

Acting Deputy Director for Operations Update (Mr. John Figuerres)

Operations Outlook. So far in FY 2025, we've deployed 25 Investigation Teams (ITs) and 15 Recovery Teams (RTs). That does not include the 7 teams currently in the field across France, Croatia, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Laos.

SE Asia Visits. Last month, I traveled to Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam to visit our deployed teams and Detachments in the field; it was an enlightening two weeks. I had the chance to see some of the most challenging recovery sites and to witness firsthand the incredibly strenuous work our members and augmentees undertake in the search for our missing. At our final site, we had the honor of hosting the US Ambassador to Vietnam along with the Vietnamese Vice Foreign Minister and the incoming Vietnamese Ambassador to the United Nations.

Oryoku Maru Project. The *Oryoku Maru* is a Japanese Hellship that was mistakenly bombed and sunk in Subic Bay in 1944. Of the 1,619 POWs originally on the ship, 286 are unaccounted for. The underwater site is threatened by future onshore development, so we have been developing plans to excavate it. First, our partner, East Carolina University, utilized cutting-edge 3D-modeling techniques to "map out" the interior of the ship. Then, in mid-April, a DPAA Underwater IT conducted a survey of the exterior of the ship, which broke into two sections.

Key Leader Engagements. We hosted the DAV National Commander; a Korea-U.S. Alliance Foundation and Korea Defense Veterans Association delegation that was respectively led by the former ROK Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the former Commander of US Forces Korea; 102 military officers from 61 countries (22 of which we operate in) who are attending National

Defense University in Washington; a Bishop of the Archdiocese of the Military Services; and the Army Chief of Chaplains. These visits provide an opportunity to highlight and build support for our mission.

Regional Teams Overview

Europe-Mediterranean (EM) Region (Ms. Heather Harris)

Field Operations. Since we last met, ITs completed activities in Italy, Poland, and Germany. The team in Italy conducted research in southern Italy searching for 3 aircraft crash sites for future archaeological survey. The IT in Poland were trying to locate the isolated burial of a B-24 pilot. In Germany, the team met with local officials in the Hurtgen Forest Region. We currently have two RTs conducting excavations in France and Croatia. The team in France returned to a site of the D-Day crash of a C-47 from which 3 crewmen are still missing. In Croatia, the RT is at a P-38 site with one missing pilot. We accelerated and expanded plans for this recovery after learning the site was under imminent danger due to a road construction project; US Embassy Zagreb worked through two Croatian Ministries to gain approval and a written assurance that road construction would be delayed until after our excavation.

Disinterment Operations. We conducted no disinterment operations in Europe during this period. Our first disinterments for FY 2025 will start in June at the Sicily-Rome and Florence American Cemeteries.

Research and Analysis. In addition to leading or participating in the investigation missions discussed above, researchers provided case summaries and met with families at the Sacramento and New Orleans FMUs; supported future investigation activities through the creation of Investigation Proposals; prepared Historical Reports for Identification Packages; and conducted routine archival research and analysis in support of case progression.

Planned Field Operations. Through July, we plan to conduct field investigations in Slovenia, Bulgaria, Austria; 2 recoveries in Germany; and disinterment operations in Belgium, Luxembourg, France, and the Netherlands.

US-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs. The Russian Side of the USRJC recently reached out to ask about the status of the US Side's renewal of the archival contract. We are cautiously optimistic that this will result in restored communications between both Sides.

Tunisia MOU. The Government of Tunisia approved and signed the renewal of an MOU with us that allows the repatriation of any recovered remains out of Tunisia and access to sites of Americans missing from WWII. US Embassy Tunis was helpful in bringing the agreement to completion after it languished in the bureaucratic process for 2 years. Under the original MOU, DPAA accomplished 10 disinterments from which we have so far made 6 IDs. Renewal of the MOU will enable us to disinter more of the 230 Unknowns still buried in the American Cemetery, when the cases are requested and approved.

Indo-Pacific (IP) Region (Mr. Chris Phelps)

Field Operations. Over the last quarter we completed back-to-back Joint Field Activities (JFA) in Laos. The first JFA consisted of 2 RTs and 1 IT to the mountain site, Phou Pha Thi. The second consisted of 3 RTs all focused on the northern cluster including Phou Pha Thi after the success in moving forward from the previous IT. In Vietnam, we began a JFA consisting of 3 RTs, an RT-Light (L), an IT that investigated 11 sites, 5 Pre-Deployment Site Surveys (PDSS), an IT-L, and a Joint Forensic Review (JFR). We completed 1 WWII recovery in Thailand; 1 IT in the Solomon Islands; 1 RT and an IT of 5 incidents in Papua New Guinea (PNG); and a PDSS in China.

Disinterment Operations. We conducted 3 disinterment missions from the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (NMCP) resulting in the disinterment of 24 WWII Unknowns associated with the West Loch explosion and 7 with the Makassar Cemetery/POW Camp in Indonesia. We also completed 2 disinterment missions at the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial (MACM), resulting in 70 WWII Unknowns, including casualties from operations in the Philippines, Saipan, and PNG. Just yesterday (April 28), we began Phase 6 of the Korean War Disinterment Project, which will remain our primary focus for the rest of this FY at NMCP.

Repatriations. This past quarter, the success of our teams recovering osseous material was marked by several repatriation ceremonies: 2 in the Philippines, 2 in Laos, 1 in Vietnam, 1 in Cambodia, 1 in the Solomon Islands, and 1 from China, leading to 118 accessions into the laboratory. Upon the return of the Solomon Islands RT to Marine Corps Base Hawaii on a Friday night, over 100 Service members and families participated in the Honorable Carry Ceremony.

Research and Analysis. Vietnam War: Prepared 26 Case Summaries for the Sacramento FMU and 19 for the New Orleans one. Korean War: Continued to build on foundational research projects and field documentation relating to losses in the ROK and China. Prepared 67 cases for Sacramento and 37 for New Orleans. WWII: More than 100 Case Summary Reviews were held in Sacramento, the largest to date for the team. Working with the Partnerships and Innovation Directorate on a project to develop complex air loss cases in India. And held staff engagement visits in PNG and the Solomon Islands. In addition, WWII and Korean War Teams held their semi-annual case coordination conference, and the Vietnam and Korean War Teams spent significant time on Salesforce taskers from family members and FOIA requests from the public.

Planned Field Operations. Next quarter, we have 1 JFA in Vietnam, composed of 2 RTs, 1 RT-L, 1 Underwater RT, 1 Partner Underwater IT, 1 PDSS, 1 IT-L, and 1 IT Host Nation. In Laos, we have 3 RTs. In the ROK, we are currently executing 1 IT of 5 incidents; to be followed by 1 RT that continues an excavation from FY 2024; and a PDSS of at least 1 additional incident. We also currently have an IT in Indonesia reviewing 5 incidents.

Planned Disinterments. This next quarter, we have 5 disinterment operations scheduled at NMCP.

Mobile Investigation Unit. DIA Stony Beach has formally submitted a work plan for this FY to the Vietnamese Office for Seeking Missing Persons (VNOSMP). They and we are awaiting a support assessment from the VNOSMP for mission execution.

China Engagement. Last month, we conducted a virtual meeting with People’s Liberation Army Leadership in preparation for hosting the Chinese delegation for an Archival Exchange in May in Hawaii. The exchange will include WWII, Korean War, Cold War, and Vietnam War cases. We will also be asking general questions about water losses and other general topics of interest.

Partnerships and Innovations (Mr. Rocky Gillette)

Field Activities. Since the beginning of the calendar year, we've successfully completed 8 partner field missions in Great Britain, the Philippines, PNG, Kuwait, and Cambodia; the Kuwait mission is for a Navy A-6E Aviator, who crashed in 1991 during Operation DESERT STORM; the Kuwait Naval Force and the Kuwait Coast Guard have been providing valuable assistance. Currently, 3 partner teams are in the field -- in the Philippines, Palau, and Italy, where our partner, SEARCH, continues its significant excavation of a WWII B-24 crash site near Grado. In the remaining months of this quarter, we're deploying 17 partners to 18 sites globally—14 to the EM Region and 4 to the IP Region; this includes an Underwater IT off the coast of Vietnam, also led by SEARCH, showcasing their versatility and the broad scope of our partners' capabilities. This is also the second partner we have introduced to Vietnam, strategically expanding accepted partners there. |

Research. During the second quarter, we maintained 91 active research projects with partners which included case research for losses from the USS *Fiske*. In addition, a new project was initiated with partners at the University of Illinois Chicago to support research and writing of case narratives that will be used to prepare cases for fieldwork and update families of missing personnel.

Innovation. We currently have 11 active innovation studies, many of which are multi-year efforts, and are finalizing deliverables to close studies in both Advanced Underwater Investigation and Aerial Remote Sensing methods. Insights, recommendations, and tools built from these studies will be transitioned for use in future DPAA efforts. Additionally, 30 new Idea Proposals from DPAA personnel and DPAA partners are undergoing review and prioritization for action as future Innovation Studies.

New Arrangements. We established new partnerships through signed MOUs with the Kassel Mission Historical Society; University of California-Davis; University of Idaho; Cardinal Point Captains; US-ASEAN Business Council; UMag Solutions; and Australian National University. The total number of active partners is 107.

Scientific Analysis Update (Dr. John Byrd)

FY 2025 Identifications to Date (as of May 8, 2025)

Total IDs = 107 newly-accounted-for

WWII = 74

|Korean War = 31

Vietnam War = 2

Accessions. For the past quarter, 122 batches of evidence have been accessioned into our laboratory system, consisting of skeletal, dental, material evidence, and/or life support. The

evidence originated from disinterments (101), DPAA field activities (9), partner activities (2), and unilateral turnovers (10). The distribution of evidence received by conflict is WWII (88%) and Vietnam War (12%).

Advances in Technology. Single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) is an emerging technology from AFDIL (see more below), which allows us to solve some of our historically hardest cases. At this point, SNPs has been used in 9 IDs and one additional portion ID for the year. It is being actively used for losses from all conflicts.

Vietnam War Identification Project. The VWIP team is continuing its data audit to validate records. This audit includes quantifying identification metrics to better understand the quantity and quality of remains recovered from SE Asia so as to develop a predictive model of remains recovery from future field operations. We received 3 new accessions from missions in Laos. A JFR was performed with Vietnamese forensic experts at the conclusion of the second quarter Vietnam mission, recommending 4 osseous materials be repatriated for further analysis.

Korean War Identification Project. In the last quarter, KWIP made 17 IDs including the 100th K55 ID of US Army 1LT William Hott who served with the 32nd Infantry Regiment and was lost on December 1, 1950, along the eastern side of the Changjin (Chosin) Reservoir. His ID as well as 4 others during the last quarter were made possible using AFDIL's new SNPs technology. To date, 728 unaccounted-for Service members have been identified from the KWIP, with 256 coming from disinterments. The team has been preparing for the accession analysis of Phase 6 Unknowns.

Enoura Maru Project. Although in the early stage of the project, 8 IDs have been made this quarter. This early success is attributed to the 98% success rate for Sanger testing of DNA samples.

Armed Forces Medical Examiner System-Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory Update (Dr. Tim McMahon)

Milestones. In less than 10 years, AFDIL has pioneered 2 of the most significant advancements in DNA human remains testing:

- In January 2016, we implemented the Next Generation (NGS) mtDNA capture method for chemically treated samples, which has supported over 544 new IDs and tested over 7,388 samples.

- After 9 years of research development and validation, in January 2025, we implemented the nuclear SNP-Kinship Analysis Method, which builds on the mtDNA capture technology, but isolates the nuclear DNA. It was developed to work with all DPAA samples. In two months, 39 samples have been tested with a 97% success rate and lead to 28 new IDs. Significant is that it:

- a. Provides nuclear results where short-tandem repeats (STRs) have failed.
- b. Opens the viable references pool to include to non-maternal (children of maternal nephew) and non-paternal (paternal niece) references and makes any reference from a first cousin once removed to a great aunt/great uncle a nuclear reference.
- c. AFDIL is the only lab in the world with the capability to perform this testing and providing a nuclear identification/kinship statistic.

- d. Identification statistics exceed the world's population which allows for definitive identification of the bone tested.

Second Quarter (January-March)*. Capitalizing on the FY 2024 growth, we continued to sustain a 20% increase in the total number of samples reported to DPAA over FY 2024. This increase equates to reporting out over 400 DNA analyses per month. We are looking to sustain this throughput for the remainder of the FY.

FY 2025 Summary as of March 31.

1. DNA Results Reported: 2,500 (averaged 417 analysis per month)
 - a. NGS results: 767 samples (this is 128 samples per month)
 - b. SNP results: 39 samples (January-March)
2. First-time Named Believed-to-Be (BTB) supporting new IDs: 96
3. Total BTB Reports (first time + additional samples): 160

* We close monthly metrics on the last working day of each month and collate them all by the 15th of the next month.

Outreach and Communications (Mrs. Jennifer Nasarenko)

Family Member Updates. On February 22, we held an in-person FMU in Sacramento, which included 401 family members (representing 208 cases), of whom 302 were first-time attendees (75%). It was the largest FMU ever in the program's 30-year history and was livestreamed on our DPAA Website as well as Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn social media sites; the archived videos can be found at www.dpaa.mil/Livestreams. The PDD led outreach engagements prior to the FMU which included staff of US Representative LaMalfa; VFW Post 67; the UC Davis Dean of the College of Letters & Science; and Sacramento State University ROTC.

On April 12, we held an in-person FMU in New Orleans, which included 174 family members (representing 77 cases), of whom 120 were first-time attendees (69%). The meeting was originally planned for March 22, but was moved to April due to concerns for travel while Congress worked on the Appropriations Bill. It was also livestreamed and is archived on our DPAA Website. The PDD's outreach engagements included staffers of House Majority Leader Steve Scalise; the Mayor of New Orleans; the Louisiana Veterans' Affairs Secretary.

The next FMU will be on May 3 in Bellevue, WA, where more than 260 family members (representing 170 cases) have registered to attend.

Poster Unveiling. Unveiled at the Sacramento FMU, this year's poster was designed by Jeanie Huffman, whose father is unaccounted for from the Vietnam War. It features one active-duty Marine and four Army cadets from Old Dominion University; they represent missing Service members from multiple military branches and conflicts. The design emphasizes the importance of never forgetting those who served and those still waiting to come home. The poster is available for order on our website at this link: <https://dpaa-mil.sites.crmforce.mil/dpaaFamWebPosters>

2025 Vietnam War AGB. The Vietnam War Annual Government Briefings will be held in Omaha, NE, June 26-27. Attending family members will have an opportunity to visit our laboratory and the

state's new Vietnam War Memorial. So far, 154 family members have registered to attend with 134 signed up for the tour of the lab.

Public Affairs. Since our last update, we have highlighted several major events and accomplishments including the first ID using the groundbreaking SNPs capture method; the milestone of the 100th K55 IDn, and the Secretary of Defense's visit to DPAA Hawaii. We continued to push DPAA messaging through a multitude of media engagements at local, national, and international levels; published more than 280 photos, videos, and stories; pushed 80 ID press releases; and answered 20 media queries. Also, we have improved our social media presence, posting across multiple platforms nearly 200 times, amplifying DPAA messaging and reaching hundreds of thousands of people.

Secretary Hegseth Visit. The article linked here highlights the Secretary's visit and embedded in it is his video message announcing the 100th K55 ID and speaking about DPAA's 10th Anniversary: <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/article/4135314/hegseth-announces-100th-service-member-identified-from-remains-turned-over-by-n/>.

Q&A Session

VVA: *No questions but noted the organization of 92,000 members is preparing to sunset, but aims to continue work on the POW/MIA issue through partnerships and has met with like-minded organizations to continue advocacy and education post-transition.*

SOA/SFA: *Have tariffs or deportee issues impacted DPAA operations?*

Answer: Tariffs have not had any operational impact as of yet and deportee-related issues have not impeded work.

Has USAID funding reductions affected DPAA fieldwork?

Answer: There has not been any impact at the field level; funding for unexploded ordnance removal and dioxin remediation programs, which are very important to SE Asia nations, were restored.

Has the hiring freeze limited research staff hiring in Southeast Asia?

Answer: The civilian hiring freeze was lifted for internal DoD transfers; military manning remains at approximately 85% due to DPAA's prioritization among the services.

Do recent forensic recoveries show good identification potential?

Answer: Several recent recoveries show strong potential, but it is normal to have variability in the quality of the remains we recover.

Why did the Vietnam War unaccounted number drop from 1,574 to 1,573?

Answer: The number changed as a result of a recent identification; the family's notification is pending due to the Navy needing to complete genealogy research of the primary next-of-kin.

Sons and Daughters in Touch: *Are Last Known Alive (LKA) cases still an active priority?*

Answer: LKA cases are a DPAA priority and part of a weekly internal review by the leadership of

Indo-Pacific Directorate.

Has there been much of an increase in AGB/FMU participation from Vietnam families?

Answer: There has been a notable uptick in AGB/FMU attendance which is attributed to increased outreach by Mission: POW-MIA and Sons and Daughters in Touch. More than 60 families registered within the first week of AGB announcement.

How can DPAA make sure Vietnam War families are aware of upcoming memorial markers in New York?

Answer: DPAA has not been notified yet of this effort in NY, but we will coordinate with the Service Casualty Offices (SCOs) to notify families

Is DPAA keeping families apprised when additional remains are identified, and can you update the forms for notification so that future generations are not kept in the dark?

Answer: DPAA notifies the SCOs when additional remains are identified, but does not maintain the forms in question because it is the responsibility of the mortuary affairs offices of each respective Service.

Disabled American Veterans: *Thanked DPAA and confirmed DAV support for the FMUs in and AGB in Omaha (for which DPAA is especially grateful!)*

VFW: *Thanked DPAA for hosting recent site visits to Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand and will send their trip report to DPAA.*

Mission POW/MIA: *Are there differences in roles and grades among historians, analysts, research specialists?*

Answer: Yes, there are differences in how civilian personnel are hired, but each subject matter expert for a case has similar duties and standards for generating leads; writing reports, producing case summaries, etc. The only differences lie in skillsets such as language capability or personnel with specific clearances.

Can analysts disclose who is assigned to a case?

Answer: Yes, they can.

Why are some family documents marked as "signed" instead of containing actual signatures?

Answer: Under the current policy, the names of personnel below the rank/grade of Colonel or GS-15 are exempted from public release. By signing it as "the research department," it was also a way to share credit for everyone on the team. We will now include a name on these memos.

Coalition of Families: *Has Russia reached out for renewed USRJC engagement?*

Answer: There has been no official outreach by Russia since the invasion of Ukraine.

Are there plans to press China for POW, air loss, and Soviet transfer archives?

Answer: DPAA had planned to host a PLA delegation to the Hawaii Lab this month and to raise the issue of access to POW and Soviet-related Archives. Regrettably, the PLA cancelled their visit, and the exchange is on hold.

Are there any updates or strategy for DPRK re-engagement?

Answer: Currently, there are no such plans given DPRK having closed off all communications with all levels of the US Government. We are communicating with US NGOs that have historically operated in North Korea to assess when will be allowed to return.

Jewish War Veterans: *Has there been any impact of hiring freezes or early retirements?*

Answer: DPAA had 21 applications for early retirement; 10 were exempted and 11 were granted. Those impacts are being mitigated.

Is there supply chain stability for the field teams?

Answer: There have not been any disruptions to DPAA's supply chain for the field teams. Some of our overseas partners have reported increased costs.

National League of Families: What is PDSS?

Answer: PDSS stands for Pre-Deployment Site Survey. It is an initial, low-footprint scoping mission to inform and plan future operations.

What is Salesforce and why is it so time-consuming?

Answer: Salesforce is an off-the-shelf software program that DPAA and the SCOs use to manage and respond to requests for information from families and the public. It is also used for families to register for the FMUs and AGBs.

Are FOIA responses published?

Answer: Freedom of Information (FOIA) requests submitted to DPAA are handled by the Washington Headquarters Services (WHS). DPAA provides the requested documents to WHS which then releases them to the requester and public as appropriate.

What is the current status of the Mobile Investigation Unit (MIU) initiative?

Answer: DPAA has facilitated acceptance of the MIU initiative by the VNOSMP. They and DIA Stony Beach are working how best to implement the concept.